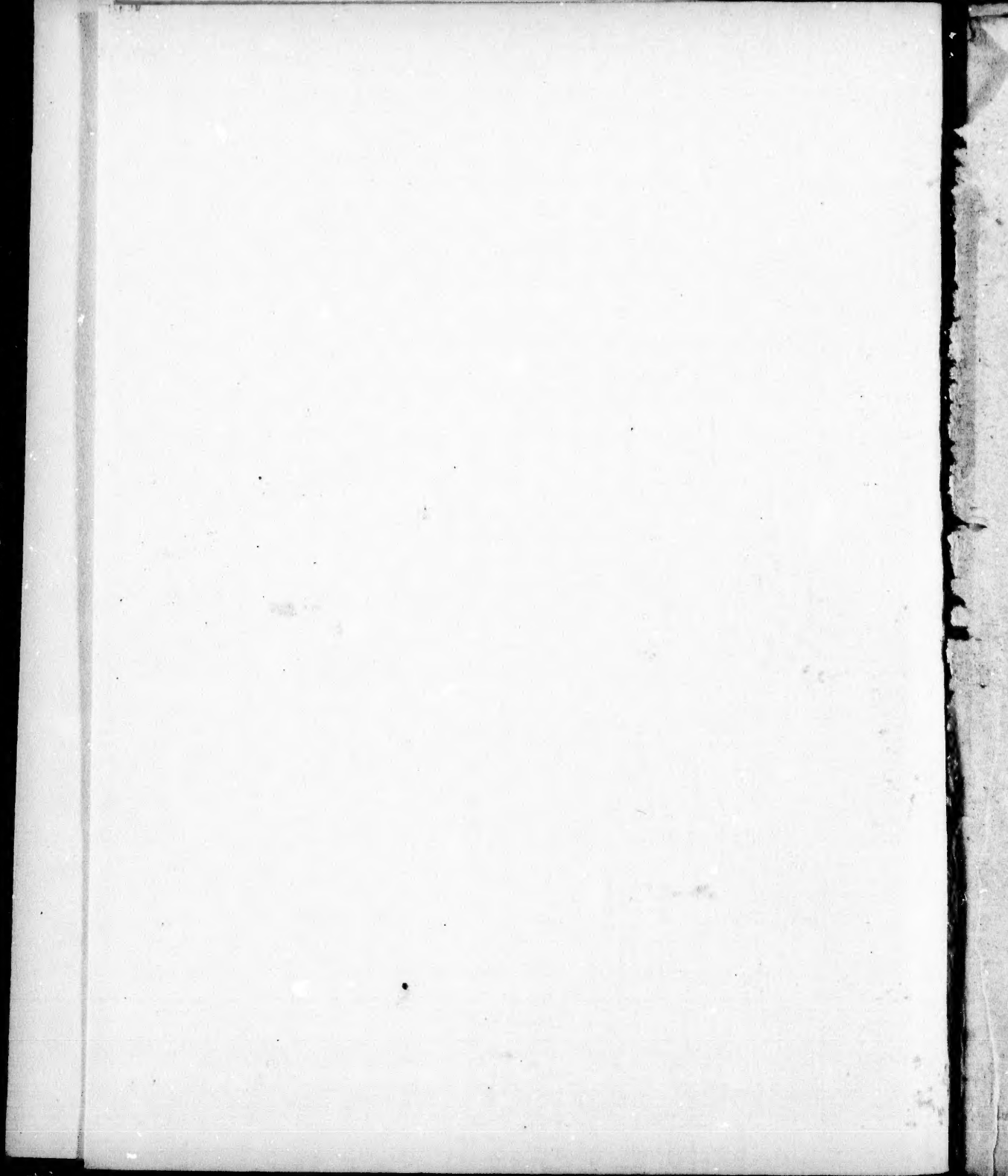




A
LETTER
ON THE
MINISTERIAL CRISIS,
BY THE
OLD MONTREAL CORRESPONDENT
OF THE
Colonial Gazette,
OF LONDON.

KINGSTON:

1843.

AFFAIRS OF CANADA.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE COLONIAL GAZETTE.

Kingston, 11th December, 1843.

Accounts will reach you by this mail, calculated to make a very false impression with respect to the state of affairs here. It will appear to you that Sir CHARLES METCALFE has entered upon a violent quarrel with the Assembly ; that he has no chance of gaining the victory in this contest with the representatives of the people ; that we have suddenly reverted to the old system of collision between the Executive and the popular branch of the Legislature ; that the Union won't work ; and that the Mother-country has now to determine whether she will alter the Provincial constitution, and rule the Colonists by force, or have done with troublesome Canada for ever. Do not believe a word of it. Nothing more has happened than one of those Ministerial crises or changes of Ministry, which must be frequent under the British Constitution wherever it may be established, and which, all experience tells us, instead of proving fatal to the Constitution itself, are the main cause of its stability : MONTESQUIEU must have had these in view when he spoke of the English King as "*un roi toujours chancelant sur un trône inébranlable.*" Nothing more, I say, has happened than one of those political storms which

have the effect of clearing the atmosphere and improving the weather under a free Constitution. You will agree with me after having attended to the following narrative of recent events.

Sir CHARLES BAGOT'S determination to admit the French Canadians to a share in the government of their country, produced an Administration enjoying the confidence of a very large majority of the people of United Canada; a majority which at the opening of the Session of Parliament just closed was represented by more than 60 of the 84 members composing the Assembly. Lord GREY'S administration in 1833 was hardly so strong as respects the constituencies, whilst the cordial adoption of Sir CHARLES BAGOT'S policy by Sir CHARLES METCALFE gave a degree of security to the LAFONTAINE—BALDWIN Ministry on the side of the Crown, which Lord GREY never enjoyed after 1832. Most people said of this Provincial Administration, "How strong it is!": only a few expressed some vague fear of its being in danger, by asking whether it was not a little too strong. Such was the aspect of our politics when the late Session commenced. The Opposition in the Assembly, numbering hardly 20 votes, were manifestly without a policy either for the country or for themselves as a party: their utmost efforts were confined to a muttered repetition of old stories about disaffection and loyalty: and the Government introduced a mass of legislative measures, with every prospect of having its own way with respect to them, and indeed with respect to every thing besides.

Yet even then there were not wanting careful observers who saw the possibility of the very shock which has occurred. I am speaking now of those who said, that perhaps the Ministry was "a little too strong." These, while they acknowledged that the bulk of the measures promised by the Ministry were likely to be of service to the country and agreeable to the people, perceived nevertheless that some of them had been prepared without regard to circumstances of great importance which no statesman would have overlooked. Believing that the downfall of the LAFONTAINE—BALDWIN Ministry has been mainly occasioned by their disregard of these circumstances, I would draw your particular attention to them.

The Union of the two Canadas has brought under the control of one Legislature two nations, so to speak, which widely differ in origin, language, laws, customs, and habits of thought. One law for these two different races would be as unjust and intolerable, as two different laws for one and the same people. It follows that in order to content the whole people of Canada, legislation under the Union must for a long while be carried on in that federal spirit, which has marked the proceedings of the Parliament of Great Britain as respects England and Scotland since the legislative union of those differing countries. Of this all-important principle the late Canadian Ministry appears never to have had any clear view, or even a glimpse. For, though what may be termed a practical necessity obliged them to frame some of their measures, not for the

whole Province, but for one or other of its recent divisions exclusively—to propose this law for what was formerly Upper Canada, and that for what was formerly Lower Canada—yet they had the inconceivable folly to depend upon their Lower Canadian majority as a means of carrying through Parliament measures for Upper Canada alone, which were repugnant to the Upper Canada majority. The case is the same as if the Ministry at home, in proposing measures applicable to Scotland alone, should disregard opinion in that part of the United Kingdom, turn a deaf ear to the remonstrances of the Scottish Members of Parliament against such measures, and carry those measures through by means of English members no less ignorant than careless of the peculiar wants and wishes of Scotland. This is what the LAFONTAINE—BALDWIN Ministry attempted with respect to an Assessment Bill for Upper Canada alone, which that part of the Province greatly disliked, and which was opposed by a majority of the Representatives of Upper Canada in the Assembly. They attempted this; but in vain, because a good many of the members for Lower Canada, perceiving the extreme in policy of the Ministers in this respect, threatened to vote with the Upper Canada majority; and the obnoxious Bill was accordingly withdrawn. This was a deep mortification to Mr. BALDWIN, as you will better understand when I shall come to speak of certain peculiarities in his character. It was probable that other measures of a like nature would share the same fate. In particular, there was a Bill for the establishment of a University in

Upper Canada, which interfered with endowments and chartered rights in that part of the Province, and which the French Canadian members, accordingly, who are strongly disposed to preserve such property and privileges, would probably have declined to support. This measure was Mr. BALDWIN's own, and a great favorite : he would probably have been compelled to withdraw it on the Monday after the Sunday on which he resigned. You must now comprehend that there were reasons for his resignation besides those which have been told to the public.

In fact it was a common saying, just before the resignation took place, that the Administration might perhaps not last through the Session. This doubt of their stability was founded on a variety of circumstances besides those to which I have already adverted. In the first place, Mr. LAFONTAINE had been successfully opposed by a body of his own especial adherents in the Assembly, led by Mr. VIGER, whose experience, patriotism, and political accomplishments give him great weight with his countrymen. This opposition was directed against one of the most important features of a set of Bills for the improvement of the Judicature of Lower Canada, on which Mr. LAFONTAINE had bestowed uncommon pains, and for which he felt the affection of a parent ; and its success, by an open vote in the Assembly, could not but have annoyed him exceedingly. Secondly, it was town-talk down to the day of the Ministers' resignation, that they had offended their adherents in Parliament by a degree of reserve

with respect to contemplated measures, and of arrogance in personal intercourse, which nothing could excuse ; nor any thing explain, save the supposition that they were intoxicated by the novel enjoyment of almost unlimited power. Thirdly, one of the Members of the Government, Mr. HINCKS, had managed to render himself so very unpopular by a curiously offensive method of exercising authority, that the Assembly could no longer listen to him with patience. Fourthly, this Ministry had received "a severe blow and greater discouragement" in the defeat of an attempt, which they appeared to view with favour, to fix upon one of their colleagues, Mr. DALY, a charge of peculation and gross delinquency, which a Select Committee of the Assembly declared to be utterly without foundation. And lastly, the secession of a number of Upper Canadian Members of the Legislative Council (or Upper House) occasioned, as it would be easy to show, by a course of general disrespect towards that House on the part of the Executive, and by particular bungling and intemperance towards them displayed by the only Member of the Executive having a seat there, had brought matters to such a pass in this branch of the Legislature, that all measures, not excepting those relating exclusively to Upper Canada, were assented to by not more than three Upper Canada Members, the remainder being nearly all French Canadians ; while there was every prospect that Legislation would be stopped by the failure of a quorum. Put all these things together, in addition to the Upper Canada difficulties in the

Lower House, and it will be plain to you that a quarrel with the Governor General was by no means necessary in order to upset the LAFONTAINE-BALDWIN Ministry before the close of the Session. If you have any doubt on the subject, be so good as to recur to the Seat of Government question, the decision of which against Upper Canada, however just and politic as regards the whole Province, had occasioned a state of feeling in this section of it, which would have induced a wise administration to exercise the utmost prudence, forbearance, and even gentleness, in the treatment of every other matter relating to Upper Canada.

These, however, are not the only grounds on which I imagine that the difference with the Governor General, on which the ex-Ministers resigned, was sought by them as a way of escaping from insurmountable difficulties in Parliament. The demand made upon the Head of the Government was of such a nature, was so thoroughly unconstitutional and absurd in itself, that those who made it must have been sure beforehand of the Governor's positive refusal to comply with it. Nor, accordingly, has any one of them ever pretended that they had the least hope of his yielding the point to them. They went to him with the certainty that their visit would end in his acceptance of their resignation. The evil consequences for the Province were manifest: a Session of Parliament unexampled in this country for the amount and to portance of the measures in hand, would comeim- an end at the most critical moment ; nearly the

whole of its past labours would be wasted ; and the people would be bitterly disappointed. Why did not Messrs. LAFONTAINE and BALDWIN postpone for a few weeks their quarrel with the Governor General, so as to let the more important measures of the Session pass into law ? The true answer is obvious : because whatever had come of the measures, their Ministry was in great danger of a blow from Parliament, which would have left those incompetent leaders without a party in the country : they retired from office, in order to save themselves from being turned out : however blinded previously by having been " too strong," they discovered their danger in the nick of time, and averted the mortification of sinking for want of popular support, by forcing upon the Governor General a quarrel in which they expected all the popular sympathies to be on their side. Mr. BALDWIN has often boasted that he is a strong party man, and now he has proved it effectually.

This view of the subject is confirmed by another consideration. Mr. BALDWIN's political character is composed almost entirely of self-esteem, so sincere as to be properly termed honest or conscientious, and perfectly inordinate in degree. Every body believes him when he says, that he cares little for power, and nothing at all for office. Now, this gentleman's position in the late ministry was by no means an agreeable one for a man of his peculiar temperament. He was brought into power in September, 1842, not as a leader of an important party in Upper Canada, (for at that time he led an op-

position in the Assembly composed of four members including himself,) but as a gentleman who had conferred obligations on the French Canadians by taking part with them against Lord SYDENHAM, and whom their strong sense of political honor led them to repay, by refusing Sir CHARLES BAGOT's proposal of office except on condition that this Upper Canadian friend were admitted to power along with them. Politically, therefore, Mr. BALDWIN was a French Canadian Member of the late administration, and he, necessarily, in the estimation of the public, played second fiddle to Mr. LAFONTAINE. To such a man as Mr. BALDWIN such a position must have been perpetual wormwood. Even the ascendancy which he acquired over Mr. LAFONTAINE in the Executive Council, thought it gave him the opportunity of carrying out his own views of policy for Upper Canada by means of French Canadian votes, was but poor compensation for the want of that prominence, that first and highest place among one's associates and in the public eye, which is always the desire of excessive self-esteem. His position at this moment must be far more agreeable to him. The late Government was formed on the principle of "justice to the French Canadians : " Mr. BALDWIN has broken it up on that of "responsible government," which is almost his one idea in politics, and of which he now figures as the martyr. His particular subject is now in everybody's mouth : he is now the observed of all observers. The LAFONTAINE-BALDWIN Ministry has

become the BALDWIN-LAFONTAINE Opposition ; and Mr. BALDWIN's smiling countenance in the Assembly has expressed his satisfaction at the change.

But the main reason of all for believing that the ex-ministers went out of their way to pick a quarrel with the Governor General, is to be found in the dispute itself. According to their own statement of the facts, (see the written communications between them and Sir CHARLES METCALFE) there existed at the time no one subject of difference between the Head of Government and themselves—no case of an appointment just then made without their advice—no project of an appointment against which they protested : but in consequence of some past differences with the Governor respecting appointments, which at the time they had not deemed it of sufficient importance to call for their resignation, they went to him one fine morning, and tendered their resignation because he refused to give them any assurance as to the future disposal of appointments under the Crown. Imagine Sir ROBERT PEEL or Lord JOHN RUSSELL, going on such an errand to the Queen, and coming back to tell the House of Commons that he had resigned because he found Her Majesty unwilling to proclaim the Crown subordinate to the Cabinet ! Would not all the world believe in that case, that the Minister had other reasons for wishing to retire from office, and had made an utterly inadmissible proposal to the Crown for the purpose of retiring on the ground of its rejection ?

I cannot doubt, however, that Messrs. BALDWIN

• & LAFONTAINE had managed to get upon bad terms with the Governor some time before their resignation. No Governor of a Colony, most assuredly, ever carried out the principle of "Responsible Government," so far as SIR CHARLES METCALFE has done in Canada; nor was there ever before in any Colony a "Provincial Administration," which, while they possessed on the one hand the confidence of the Representative-body, enjoyed on the other so much executive power—had their own way so entirely in their capacity of Ministers—as this said LAFONTAINE-BALDWIN Administration. Yet it appears by all accounts, that the two leaders were not content with substantial power, but also wanted to play the part of masters over the Governor; that they carried on their whole intercourse with him in an exacting domineering spirit; that they perpetually whipped and goaded the willing horse. Such monstrous impolicy may be accounted for in MR. BALDWIN by reference to his boundless good opinion of himself: in MR. LAFONTAINE it probably arose, in part from a habit of suspicion and opposition engendered by the long subjection of his people to every species of injustice, but still more from a haughty and overbearing temper which is matter of complaint against him even among his particular followers. Be this, however, as it may, there can be no doubt of the fact, that these two Members of the Executive Council did to SIR CHARLES METCALFE what is vulgarly called "stroking the dog the wrong way of the hair." The *sang-froid* and wariness of the veteran Governor prevented him from repay-

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ing such caresses with an inopportune bite, but his growl was often heard in the Council Room. So the ex-Ministers themselves have told us, by their use of the word "antagonism." It follows that they had not the least prospect of being assisted by the Governor if the Parliament should frown upon them. And the final conclusion is, that, upon the whole, their resignation upon a ground which was sure to obtain for them much popular sympathy, was about the most politic of their Ministerial acts.

This popular sympathy they have spared no pains to secure. They represent Sir CHARLES METCALFE as an old Indian, disliking and incapable of understanding free institutions. They paint him mounted on an elephant, the despotic ruler of oriental slaves.* They boldly assert that he is a foe to "Responsible Government"; and then, forgetting their oath of secrecy as Executive Councillors, they tell in the Assembly a variety of stories about appointments to office, which he has no means of contradicting, and which go to make out that he systematically endeavoured to dispose of the patronage of the Crown without consulting his responsible advisers. Because a new administration is not instantly formed, they assert that we have reverted to the old plan of irresponsible rule; and Mr. LAFONTAINE enforces the complaint, by pettishly attacking the Governor's Civil Secretary for wearing his official uniform when he delivers a message to the Assembly from the Head of the Government. In a

* See MR. HINCKS' *Toronto Examiner* of the 6th Inst

word, the whole aim of the ex-ministers since their resignation seems to have been, in utter defiance of those constitutional notions which they profess under the name of attachment to "Responsible Government," to excite fear, and jealousy, and dislike of the Governor General personally, and to persuade the Country that unless Messrs. BALDWIN and LAFONTAINE be supported against Sir CHARLES METCALFE, this Colony will be deprived of the proper consequences of its representative system.

And further, the doers of dirty work for the party (all parties have instruments suitable for such work) have been indefatigable in spreading reports to the effect, that Sir CHARLES METCALFE is unwell and tired of Canada; that his once-powerful intellect has succumbed to climate and labour; that he is timid and incapable of resisting a vigorous assault; that the ex-ministers resigned with a certainty of getting into office again with more power than ever; and that overtures have already been made to them with a view of their returning to office on their own terms.

By these and such like tales, added to the misrepresentations described in the last paragraph but one, a large majority of the Assembly (including most of my old friends, the "loose fish," who always swim with the stream), were hurried into supporting the ex-ministers by a vote of confidence. Most people thought it was all over with the Governor General, and that he would either retire from Canada, or convulse the Province like Sir FRANCIS HEAD by throwing himself into the arms

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of the opponents of the late Ministry. It is evident that he has never for a moment contemplated any thing of the sort. His personal demeanour throughout this "Ministerial crisis" has been singularly calm, patient, and good-humoured. Instead of discarding "responsible government" as impracticable, he emphatically declares to the Assembly that no other system is practicable in this colony: instead of denouncing the Upper Canada Reformers, who hastily voted against him, he invites them to assist in forming a new administration as liberal as the last: instead of encouraging the Upper Canada Conservatives to get into a passion of loyalty, he begs of them to avoid extreme courses, and to support him with only a moderate zeal: instead of quarrelling with the French Canadians, he proclaims the justice and wisdom of giving them a due share in the executive government of their country, and pledges himself to form no permanent administration without offering power to several of the most prominent of their leaders. Above all, he has intimated, by his Speech when proroguing the Parliament, that he has no thought of retreating from the difficulties of his position. The natural fruits of such presence of mind and deliberation of purpose are already beginning to appear. Men of all parties, with the exception of the late Ministers and their immediate partizans, ask what the quarrel has been about, and talk of the possibility of forming a Government supported by a majority of the present Assembly. Mr. VIGER, who in the absence of Mr. PAPINEAU may be deem-

ed *the* leader of the French Canadians, is understood to have overcome his repugnance to the troubles and responsibilities of office, and to have accepted the first place in a new Administration. It is expected that to-morrow will not pass over without the acceptance of office by several other leading members of the Assembly and Legislative Council. In less than a month, probably, a strong Administration will be completed, likely to enjoy the confidence of both Houses of Parliament, and qualified to carry into effect a popular system of government without offensive arrogance towards the Governor General or any body else, and without falling into any of the other errors of Messrs. BALDWIN and LAFONTAINE. This is my own expectation. Should it be realized, the public voice will pronounce that the incompetence of its leaders was the true cause of the downfall of the late Ministry, and that the shock which their resignation occasioned was but one of those evils out of which good cometh in abundance.

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